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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 001032

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: PRESIDENT TO STAY ENGAGED ON BULGARIAN MEDICS

REF: SOFIA 963

Classified By: AMB. JAMES PARDEW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: President Purvanov met Ambassador on June 8 to discuss his recent trip to Libya to pursue the release of the Bulgarian medics. Purvanov said Qadhafi recognizes the seriousness of the problem of the medics, would like to find a solution, but does not seem to have a plan. He thanked the U.S. for the personal support of President Bush and the Secretary and asked that international pressure continue to

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be applied to Libya. Purvanov said he would keep up the momentum on this issue while other Bulgarian politicians are occupied with the current political campaign. He promised to coordinate his actions, saying there must be one-hundred percent continuity regardless of the changes that may occur in the election. END SUMMARY

2. (C) Purvanov acknowledged the risky nature of his trip to Libya, but felt it was useful to obtain first-hand information and keep alive the bilateral dialogue with Libya on behalf of the medics. He said Col. Qadhafi was aware of the gravity of the problem and eager to find a solution, although Purvanov thought Qadhafi lacked a clear vision and plan for solving the problem. Qadhafi is at the same time worried about massive international pressure on behalf of the medics, and the sentiment in Benghazi - home to the infected children - against his regime, Purvanov said.

3. (C) Qadhafi tried to involve Bulgaria in direct negotiations with the association of parents of the infected children. Purvanov made it clear to Qadhafi that the Bulgarian government cannot negotiate directly with the parents - especially regarding payment. This would be tantamount to admitting guilt, said the President. The GOB must work directly with the Libyan government or Qadhafi. However, Purvanov said he understands the need to make a gesture to the parents due to the gravity of the situation.

4. (C) Purvanov intends to work on an action plan to include medications, medical care, equipment, etc. One of the mothers told Purvanov that the GOL could only afford pain-killers for the children. Bulgaria is prepared to make a modest contribution individually, but will direct the bulk of its donations through the multilateral umbrella. Purvanov said he agreed with the U.S. view that indirect donations are preferable to direct gifts. He mentioned Bulgaria would like to raise funds through large companies or NGOs for supplies or to send patients abroad for treatment.

5. (C) Purvanov said that, surprisingly, Qadhafi was more moderate on his views towards the medics' trial than his Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The latter tried to push Bulgaria towards the Sharia law and to negotiate directly with the parents. Purvanov said Qadhafi made no anti-American remarks except in his general comments against the West.

6. (C) COMMENT: Purvanov's risky visit to Libya may have bought the GOB - and the medics - some time, through the delayed court decision in Benghazi. However, the next government will quickly have to pick up the pace and lead discussions directly with the Libyans, as well as coordinate multilateral efforts. Purvanov seems to be pressing his Presidential authority into an area usually led by the government. However, during the current election cycle, there is a vacuum on this issue that the popular and pragmatic president feels obliged to fill. END COMMENT

7. (U) Minimize considered.